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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/15/2017

TAGS: PHUM PGOV PINR TU

SUBJECT: HRANT DINK SUCCESSOR CONCERNED FOR FUTURE OF ARMENIAN COMMUNITY IN TURKEY

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Ambassador met with Hrant Dink's widow and Armenian-Turkish weekly Agos' new editor-in-chief Etyen Mahcupyan to express condolences and discuss the state of affairs for the newspaper and the Armenian community in Turkey since Dink's January 19 assassination. Mahcupyan expressed concerns for the security of community members; many are considering whether to leave Turkey based in part on how the government carries out the murder investigation. He told Ambassador he is receiving threats from the same sources who had threatened Dink and is maintaining a low media profile while exploring plans to expand the newspaper to a broader audience. End summary.

¶2. (C) Meeting in slain human rights advocate Hrant Dink's former office at Agos newspaper headquarters on February 8, Ambassador expressed his condolences and those of the USG to Dink's widow Rakeł. He noted that Dink was a historic figure who had argued passionately for reconciliation and mutual understanding. The effectiveness of that was manifest on the streets of Istanbul the day of the funeral. While all of Dink's friends and adversaries share in the family's tragic loss, it should also be possible to take some pride in that message on the street and hope that it will help lead Turkey in a positive direction.

¶3. (C) Mrs. Dink's composed demeanor belied the pain she expressed in words about her loss. She remarked that while her husband was receiving threats, she and Dink assumed the government would protect him, if for no other reason than to avoid international embarrassment. She expressed disappointment as well that figures in the international community who were interested in her husband had also failed to protect him when he needed protection.

¶4. (C) Mahcupyan, the domestic policy director of the Turkish Economic and Social Studies Foundation (TESEV) became the new editor-in-chief of Agos shortly after Dink's death. He stated that though the paper was receiving much support (including new outside funding), he didn't know what was in store for the community. He specified that many community members were "considering whether to stay or go" and that two factors would influence their decisions: a) Turkey's reaction, in particular the manner in which the government carries out the investigation into Dink's assassination, and b) Agos' reaction.

¶5. (C) Mahcupyan reported he is now receiving threats from the same sources who had threatened Dink prior to his assassination. He is keeping a low profile partly out of security concerns but primarily to keep the media's attention on the Dink murder investigation, which he described as a litmus test on the GOT's intentions vis-a-vis the safety of the community and Dink's family. He added that the community is very angry and that he is not in a position to assuage

their anger, which he shares.

¶16. (C) Regarding the future of Agos, Mahcupyan explained he had discussed expanding the newspaper's operations with Hrant Dink during the first half of 2006. He is now thinking about putting some of those plans into action, including marketing the paper for a Turkey-wide audience. He noted the paper had already expanded from 12 pages per edition to 20 and is being distributed nationally. While Hrant Dink had used the paper to advocate on the Turkish-Armenian community's behalf, he would now seek to use Agos as a vehicle for others who want to speak out.

¶17. (C) Mahcupyan said he remains optimistic about society's response in the long term to the nationalist and anti-liberalization challenges facing Turkey, but is pessimistic about the government's response in the short term. He believed too many issues were inter-mingled, including PM Erdogan's probable intent to pursue the Presidency. Mahcupyan expected it would take two or three generations to "close the gap" and asked rhetorically, "What will we (the community) do in the meantime?"

¶18. (C) In response to Ambassador's query as to what the USG could do to help Agos and the Armenian community, Mahcupyan stated it was a difficult balance to strike. He suggested we continue to demonstrate interest in, and understanding of, the situation in order to give the impression that the U.S. might act if things got worse. However, at the same time, he proffered that being too active now could prompt a further nationalist backlash.

¶19. (C) Mahcupyan intends eventually to spend half of his time at Agos and the other at TESEV, though he is currently

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concentrating his efforts on the newspaper. He will travel to Washington later this month with TESEV Chairman Can Paker in order to participate in a forum on religion and politics in Turkey organized by the US Commission on International Religious Freedom.

¶10. (U) Biographic Data: Etyen Mahcupyan is a graduate of Bosphorus University, Department of Chemical Engineering. He received his MA in Management from the same university and MA in Political Science from Ankara University. He has worked as a columnist at Radikal, Yenibinyil and Zaman newspapers and edited a program on Samanyolu TV. Mahcupyan has published nine books on current domestic policy.

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